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ABSTRACT

Presented in this article is a synthesis of the strategy and process used to maximize the reliability of findings about desegregation, and to exhaust all probable resources germane to such research. The paradigm used focuses on a three-phase research strategy encompassing literature review (Phase I); an ERIC search of "Current Index to Journals in Education" and "Resources in Education" (Phase II); and active investigation (Phase III). A preliminary analysis of the content of the literature on school desegregation (with particular emphasis on pairing) is offered, and the dilemma facing public school researchers and evaluators who wish to publish timely and practical findings is discussed. (Author/CMG)

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IN SEARCH OF RELEVANT INFORMATION ON URBAN SCHOOL DESEGREGATION/PAIRING: A DILEMMA FACING PUBLIC EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The process of educational research, and information retrieval, specifically related to urban school desegregation are discussed in this paper. A paradigm is presented which focuses on a three-phase research strategy encompassing Literature Review (Phase I); ERIC: Journals/Periodicals Search (Phase II); and Active Investigation (Phase III).

This work offers a preliminary analysis of the content of the literature on school desegregation, and discusses the dilemma facing public school researchers and evaluators to publish timely and practical findings.

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IN SEARCH OF RELEVANT INFORMATION ON URBAN SCHOOL DESEGREGATION/PAIRING: A DILEMMA FACING PUBLIC EDUCATION

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The process of accumulating significant information and documentation on desegregation, specifically pairing, presents a challenge to both the novice researcher and the experienced scholar or evaluator of educational programs.[1] Presented in this article is a synthesis of the strategy and process employed to maximize the reliability of findings, and to exhaust all probable resources germane to such research.

In the case of school desegregation, one can easily be overwhelmed by the well-over five thousand (5000) books and articles on the subject.[2] Compounding this situation is the difficulty one experiences when attempting to identify a subtopic. For example, on school pairing, little if any actual indexing is documented in the literature. As a result, to make sense of existing data sources, a gestalt methodology is both an imperative and a rewarding, but challenging, prerequisite to conducting the research. Thus, the focus of research into school pairing, or any other less acclaimed subtopics in school desegregation, involves three phases: Phase I, literature review; Phase II, periodical review; and Phase III, active investigation.

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1. School pairing is the concept of desegregating two racially distinct schools, usually at the elementary level. When the racial ratio approaches 50-50, grades K-3 or 1-3 can be assigned to one school and grades 4-6 to another, assuming reasonably equal building capacity. (Foster, 1973)

2. In 1978 Robert A. Dentler wrote in the Journal of Education, "The American educational literature on school desegregation...consists of roughly 4,000 books and articles." Today, by reasonable approximation, double that number of works now exist.

Phase I

This component involves the reading of historical perspectives, legal summations, and written discussions on school desegregation. Phase I of the methodology provides the researcher with an initial base of understanding.

The suggested methodology is a three phased strategy that guarantees the potential for success. First, there is the need for a literature review. Second, one must search for information in journals. Third, an active investigative research process is imperative. The literature review process entails an extensive search of the card catalogue in a well supplied library.[3] After identifying possible relevant works, one can decide to accumulate the books for review, or do a sampling of specific current titles that will provide both insight and significant information. Subsequently, a detailed listing of prospective titles should be made and some reviewed at once for an historical and a current understanding of events.

A useful model of the described process in Phase I is, Assessment of Current Knowledge About Effectiveness of School Desegregation Strategies. (Hawley, et. al. 1981) This work is a nine volume national study. As with most such studies, a researcher must be cautious in adapting the findings. In many instances, such research findings and documented references should be viewed as a starting point. I find that many of the works on desegregation in this national study are summations which require extensive follow-up, review and reading of the citations. With regard to school pairings, aside from a brief informative description, no significant research is presented. However, the thousands of books and periodicals cited, along with the resource centers listed, make this study an important contribution to the educational desegregation research field.

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3. In my personal experiences, I had access to the excellent Pedagogical Library of the School District of Philadelphia, in addition to the Philadelphia Public Free Library, as well as the libraries of Drexel University and the University of Pennsylvania; the extensive review of card catalogues and the identification of possible books to read and review at each of these institutions provide a research nirvana for me in pursuing this project.

After the literature review is started (Phase I), the individual must be aware of time constraints, and decide upon a focus that will yield specific relevant information. An unconscious and seemingly hypnotic effect does occur that keeps one at this phase. Therefore, until the need for a change and/or a refreshing new strategy requires one to move-on, while proceeding, an established perspective is imperative. (Also, consideration of one's client, audience(s), and policy makers' needs for timely information should make one curtail the level of involvement at this phase unless the information is a rich gold mine, in which case, one keeps on digging).

A preliminary content analysis of the literature research on school desegregation/pairing reveals an overwhelming trend by researchers, publishers and editors to postulate objectivity. Accepted on face value, as both valid findings and/or expert opinions, published desegregation literature appears to be dominated by researchers and evaluators suggesting or detailing findings that call for continual school desegregation efforts. The contents of the works are decidedly pro-desegregation, in spite of other findings that support an anti-desegregation stance. Unpublished reports, the experiences of professional individuals in school desegregation settings must be pursued and encouraged to substantiate or bring into proper perspective the plight of school desegregation, which appears to lag behind positive acts of implementation.

The dilemma in public school desegregation, relative to anti-desegregation views, is the unconscious racist underpinnings which are displayed as subtlely, institutional moods and/or hidden rhetoric. Relative to minority parents' views and the premise of pro-con expressions on the subject, Edmonds, et.al. point out, "It is therefore important to remember that Black opposition to segregation need not mean Black enthusiasm for school desegregation. Therefore, desegregation planning

that successfully represents the interests of Black Americans must reflect at least two sets of views: All Black Americans oppose segregation. Many Black Americans are ambiguous in their attitude toward school desegregation".[4]

Extrapolated to apply to researchers, program evaluators, and others in the field of school desegregation study, policy planning and implementation, the ambiguous and expectantly valid views of the "silent minorities" (i.e., parents and researchers), must be explored. Afterall, the minority viewpoint of researchers, labeled as such due to the proliferation of pro-desegregation perspectives (without regard to race), could turn out to be a silent majority. Whether or not exploration into this area yields numerically significant results is unimportant. The identification and articulation of a wider range of views and perspectives are necessary in order to balance the "unreal" pro-stances.

As a researcher of the desegregation literature, and while participating in "active research", in light of the above trends in the professional attitudes and research findings, I find that it is imperative to maintain a mindset of neutrality. In a reading of many of the works on school desegregation and pairing, one can become swayed as a pendulum, based on some well articulated, impressively theorized and/or valid findings. Qualitative works (i.e., descriptive accounts of events), are the basis for understanding the context of quantitative findings. Yet, all research results should be cautiously accepted. Objectivity is an illusion that exists in the social scientist's mind; therefore, a researcher must make a continual personal effort to maintain an openly neutral mindset. This is imperative and accomplishable via awareness of one's bias and viewpoints which must be set aside or understood through intermitten reflective analysis on the research effort.

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4. Ronald R. Edmonds, Charles W. Cheng, and Robert G. Newby, "Desegregation Planning and Educational Equity", in Theory Into Practice, Volume 17 Number 1, 1978, p. 13.

Phase II

A second phase of the methodology is the review of periodicals. The Education Index (EI) and the Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE) are recommended. These indices provide an extensive subject breakdown. Although a "school pairing" subtopic is not given as a descriptor, the procedure one must employ is to continue to identify as many relevant subject areas and topics as possible, and to pursue the research with a focus on learning about the field under study.

After reviewing periodicals listed on the subject in Education Index, one proceeds to the next intraphase of periodical, journal and monograph research.[5] This involves a search of Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) which encompasses CIJE and Resources in Education (RIE). Because of the volume of potential articles, having knowledge of using the ERIC computer-link process or experienced librarians prove to be both timely and beneficial.

Phase III

Thus far, this discussion has detailed a research process on public accounts and documents. The next step is "active research". Active research entails contact with individuals, communications with school districts, and interactions with resource centers having responsibility for maintaining current and historical information on desegregation. (Locales and/or individuals are identifiable after preliminary research).

In summation, the research paradigm discussed is a methodology that can be identified as having the following components: Literature Research; Pediodical/ERIC Search; and Active Investigation. It is appropriate when replicating this methodology to repeat the process of research at each phase. A cyclical process,

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5. Finding the periodicals and scholarly journals indexed as having desegregation related subject matter is extremely demanding. However, the availability of numerous facilities (e.g., public and college libraries) makes the job less difficult.

for example, is helpful. Instead of spending time exhausting the literature in each component, a selective review of a number of sources within each phase, followed by a second or subsequent endeavors if necessary, can be effectively done. This can provide one with insight, be timely, and will allow one to develop a preliminary viewpoint that leads to future intelligent decisions on what references to read indepth. Also, by utilizing a cyclic research process within each phase of the described methodology, one is continually provided with background understanding: thus, allowing for greater proficiency in the active investigation component.

The process of notetaking as a systematic, scientific protocol is crucial. As one researches and employs each phase of the strategy outlined above, the synthesis of the data and the use of relevant findings to produce a professionally sound research project are enhanced and assured.

The dilemma facing public education is the capacity of practitioners and scholars to contribute to the field of school desegregation. Their research reports, studies, and evaluations must be reliable and capable of being understood by a number of audiences. Future investigators will find the paradigm I offer to be a firm base upon which to research those issues of desegregation which, while being very complex, become comprehensible and relevant.

Thus, a challenge exists. There exists a need for knowledge on desegregation practices. Not theoretical propositions mired in a morass of research findings, but rather information that will contribute to the recognition of research's relevancy to policy. In the alternative, of equal significance in the field of desegregation research, is the need to enrich public education by transforming interpretive data into readable, practical findings.

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